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AUTHOR Filsinger, Erik,; Wilson, Margaret R.
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ABSTRACT

Since possible predictor variables of marital adjustment are too numerous for a complete analysis in any one study, determination of the relative importance of such predictors is needed for theory development. In order to examine the importance of socioeconomic rewards, family development characteristics, and religiosity as predictors of marital adjustment, volunteer marital dyads (N=208) from a cross section of Protestant churches completed measures of marital adjustment, family development issues, religiosity and demographic questionnaires. Multivariate analyses of the three variables showed that religiosity was the strongest and most consistent predictor of marital adjustment, predicting twice as much variance as did socioeconomic rewards or family development characteristics. For both husbands and wives number of children was negatively related to marital adjustment. The data suggest that religion facilitates the adaptation process necessary to marital adjustment, perhaps by providing a set of norms by which to live. (WAS)

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MARITAL ADJUSTMENT: A MULTIVARIATE LOOK AT PREDICTORS*

Erik E. Filsinger**

and

Margaret R. Wilson

Arizona State University

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**Mailing address: 201 Center for Family Studies, Department of Home Economics, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona 85287.

Marital Adjustment: A Multivariate Look at Predictors

Abstract

The predictive effects of religiosity, socioeconomic rewards, and family development characteristics were examined. Two-hundred and eight couples responded to a questionnaire containing measures of each research area. Religiosity was found to be the most predictive variable, even when controlling for marital conventionality. The results are discussed in terms of implications for theories of family functioning.

Through the years the trend in studying the predictors of marital adjustment has been toward multivariate analysis of predictor variables (Albrecht, 1979; Glenn and Weaver, 1978; Miller, 1976; Spanier et al., 1979). As a result, a more controlled comparison of which variables are more important and which are less important has begun. Determining the relative importance of predictor variables is important for theory development. Those variables which explain more of the variance in marital adjustment should be weighted more heavily in the theory. In addition, examination of the stronger predictor variables can lead to general principles which help to explain the process of marital adjustment.

However, as recent theoretical work attests (Burr, 1973; Lewis and Spanier, 1979), the possible predictors of marital adjustment are so many that a complete analysis is virtually impossible in one given study. Several strategies have been used to deal with the diversity of variables. One strategy has been to analyze a large group of relatively unrelated predictors. For example, Glenn and Weaver (1978) used eight variables from three national surveys and compared their relative contribution to marital happiness.

Another multivariate strategy has been to focus on one basic conceptual area, e.g., family development, and examine the effects of variables related to that perspective. Miller (1976) used path analysis to reach a model of marital satisfaction based on the notion of family development. Jorgensen (1970) examined five measures of socioeconomic rewards in an attempt to

determine their relationship to marital quality.

Because there are so many conceptual areas, many studies have to be done in order to put the pieces together. Part of this process will be to compare the relative contribution of variables from different conceptual areas. This represents a middle road between the two approaches outlined above. Three areas were selected for this study: socioeconomic rewards, family development characteristics, and religiosity. They were selected because of their potential explanatory power, their historical acceptance as predictors, and their different types of explanation. Because they imply such different explanations of marital adjustment, a comparison of their relative predictive power would help to clarify which marital processes are more important for marital adjustment.

The socioeconomic characteristics of the couple have been a mainstay of the sociological explanation of marital adjustment. Reflecting that usage, Lewis and Spanier (1979) include a number of propositions relating such variables as husband's education, occupational prestige and income to marital quality (their term for adjustment). The explanation given for the relationship between those characteristics and marital adjustment is that higher socioeconomic resources are rewarding and therefore make the marriage more attractive (cf. Levinger, 1965). It should be noted that some of the later, more sophisticated studies (Albrecht, 1979; Glenn and Weaver, 1978; Jorgensen, 1979) have not found socioeconomic rewards to be good predictors of marital adjustment.

A set of variables noted for their continuing importance during the decade of the 1970s (Spanier and Lewis, 1980) are family development characteristics. Many variables can be involved. The effects of children on marital adjustment is still a controversial topic (Rollins and Galligan, 1978). The notion of the family life cycle has also received close scrutiny. In a comparison of several ways of stratifying family development characteristics, Spanier and his colleagues (1979) have suggested that other stratification systems such as marriage cohort and age cohort are just as effective predictors as the traditional notion of family life cycle stages.

While the importance of religion on marital adjustment has been long known, it has not received its due credit. Theoretically religious variables are most frequently discussed as an outside pressure to remain together. Levinger (1973) suggested that proscriptive religion and joint church attendance served as sources of barrier strength, that is, mechanisms which make breakup costly. In a similar fashion, Lewis and Spanier (1979) place religion in their model as a threshold which lies between marital quality and marital stability. In their model, low quality marriages may stay together because of religious proscriptions.

In both theoretical perspectives religion is treated as having constrictive effects. It primarily affects marital stability, not marital adjustment. To the contrary, religion may have direct, positive effects on marital adjustment. Religion may make the family more attractive by supporting

family values and activities and by facilitating adaptation to life's problems. In fact, Wilkinson and Tanner (1980) state, "Religiosity has a direct effect on family affection independent of family activities" (p. 302).

The empirical importance of religiosity in marital adjustment is supported by a number of studies (Babchuk, 1967; Hunt and King, 1978; Kunz and Albrecht, 1977). Church attendance was the strongest predictor of marital happiness in Glenn and Weaver's (1978) multivariate study. These findings are enough to support its continued investigation. It should be systematically compared to other partial explanations of marital adjustment. The present study was designed to take that step.

The study was also designed to address a question which has been raised in previous investigations of religiosity and marital adjustment. Namely, is there a genuine relationship between the two variables or are the empirical connections due to more religious individuals giving the socially desirable response. Glenn and Weaver (1978) did find a relationship between church attendance and marital adjustment but stated that, "Church attendance is a useful control variable for this study, but confident inferences on its effect on the quality of marriages must be left to researchers able to deal more adequately with the social desirability set" (p. 279).

Edmond's (1967) scale for checking conventionality (social desirability) in responses to tests for marital adjustment has been criticized on several grounds, including empirical evidence that its effect has been overrated. Hansen (1981) has provided

evidence that conventionalization is really part of marital adjustment rather than the other way around. Burr (1973) included church membership and attendance under conventionality in his propositional inventory of marital adjustment. Murstein and Beck (1972) suggested that happy couples naturally accentuate their positive qualities. In line with those researchers, the present authors would prefer to discard the conventionality issue as irrelevant. However, the arguments are still fresh and as a result the issue was included.

In sum, the present study investigated the explanatory power of variables associated with the following explanatory frameworks: socioeconomic rewards, family development characteristics, and religiosity. In order to test for possible contamination, the effects of social desirability were also investigated.

METHOD

Sample

The subjects for the study were 208 marital dyads contacted in churches from a large Southwestern metropolitan area. The sample was stratified by religious denomination in order to arrive at a cross-section of Protestant churches. The following denominations were represented: Baptist, Nazarene, Charismatic, Seventh-Day Adventist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Congregrational. Over eighty percent of the couples were in their first marriage. The average length of marriage was just over 16 years and an average of 1.76 children

were present. The average age for the husbands and wives were 45.10 and 42.37, respectively.

Reported mean income was $18,000. Forty-seven percent of the husbands and 34% of the wives had a college education. The raw-score mean Social Position Index (Hollingshead, 1957) was 33.37 with a standard deviation of 14.94. The lower the raw score, the higher the socioeconomic status.

Measures

The ministers asked for volunteers from their congregations to participate in a study of marital adjustment. Those couples who did so received a questionnaire packet containing separate questionnaires for the husband and the wife. Included were measures of marital adjustment, demographic characteristics, family development issues, and religiosity. The couples were instructed to complete their questionnaire separately.

Marital adjustment was measured by the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976). The coefficient alpha for the scale's reliability was .94 for the husbands and .93 for the wives. Two measures of the dyad's socioeconomic rewards were used: husband's social position (Hollingshead, 1957) and family's income, collected as grouped data in seven categories. Education was not used separately because it is included in the Hollingshead Social Position Index. Raw scores were used on the Social Position Index in order to retain maximal variance. Number of children and length of marriage were included as measures of family development characteristics.

Religiosity was measured by the DeJong-Faulkner-Warland

Religiosity Scale (1978). High religiosity corresponds to greater orthodoxy in line with traditional Protestant Christianity. That scale is based on a multidimensional conceptualization of religiosity consisting of the dimensions of religious belief, religious ritual, religious experience, religious knowledge and social consequences. Thirty-seven items tap the various dimensions. Coefficient alpha was .83 and .81 for the husbands and wives, respectively. Edmond's (1967) measure of marital conventionality was also included, with alphas of .87 and .85, resppectively.

Table 1 includes the zero-order correlations and means for these variables. They are included as the basic data matrix so that other researchers might try alternative specification models if desired. Because marital adjustment was conceptualized as a dyadic phenomena, couple scores were used where felt applicable. All of the predictors describe the couple. The couple's average Religiosity score was used. Average (couple) marital adjustment was included along with the separate spousal scores in order to compare analyses.

Table 1 about here

RESULTS

Multiple regression was used to determine the relative contribution of the predictor variables to marital adjustment. Because the authors did not feel that conventionality was of

critical importance, two analyses were done -- one with and one without the conventionality measure.

Table 2 contains the results of the analysis without conventionality. Two variables, couple religiosity and number of children contributed significantly to couple's marital adjustment. The same results were evidenced for the husband's marital adjustment. In both cases religiosity is positively, and number of children negatively, related to marital adjustment. The results for the wive's marital adjustment were similar, but the family income were also significantly related. A cursory examination of the Beta values indicates the predominant importance of the couple's religiosity compared to the other characteristics.

Table 2 about here

The results for the analyses including the conventionality measures are presented in Table 3. It should be noted that it was expected the Edmond's measure would correlate with marital adjustment because it measures the same thing (cf. Hansen, 1981). The multiple regression controlled for its effects in the estimation of the regression coefficients for the other variables.

Table 3 about here

For all three measures of marital adjustment religiosity remains a strong predictor. Its significance is not negated by the inclusion of the conventionality measure, although conventionality could be expected to be related to both religiosity and to marital adjustment.

Conventionality wiped out the effects of number of children. Length of marriage emerged as a significant predictor for the couple's and for the wive's DAS. This may suggest that conventionality is a suppressor variable mediating the effects of length of marriage on marital adjustment. Income also emerged as a predictor for the couple and the wife. The higher the income, the more satisfied she was.

Because significance tests for Beta values can be affected by multicollinearity, a more exact test of the significance of the contributions of the variable sets was undertaken. The test used was the incremental F-test (Nie, et al., 1975). Each of the variable groups was dropped out of the multiple regression, one set at a time. The subsequent R-squares were then compared to see if the increase in explained variance associated with each set was significant. Table 4 contains the increments in explained variance associated with each set.

Table 4 about here

The results indicated that overall each area of explanation was significant, but the religiosity explained roughly twice as much variance as did socioeconomic rewards or

family development characteristics. For the husbands, religiosity was the only significant area of prediction. For the wives, the other two areas were also important.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Religiosity was the most consistent and strongest predictor of marital adjustment. Weak support was found for the theories of socioeconomic rewards and family development. The greater the religiosity, the higher the marital adjustment. There are several possible reasons why religiosity appears to be so important for positive marital adjustment and is not just a barrier to marital dissolution. Burr (1973) draws upon Wallin and Clark's (1964) earlier notion of compensatoriness. The argument is that religion tends to compensate for lack of satisfaction in other areas. While this may sound like religion "as the opiate of the masses" it is not necessarily a negative phenomenon. Part of adjustment at the individual level refers to changing oneself (e.g., goals, expectations) to be more in line with what is real. This is the process of accomodation. Religion facilitates accomodation; thereby making life, or a marriage, better. Marriage has long been known as a give and take.

Secondly, religion provides a set of norms by which to live, thereby making life easier. In a real way, choice entails difficulty. In reviewing the effects of proscriptive religion, Levinger (1965) stated that, "...reasonably strict Protestants have the lowest probability of divorce...Such studies have also shown that persons of unconventional religious convictions are

most prone to use divorce as a solution to their marital problems" (p. 24). As has been argued herein, religiosity is also positively associated with marital adjustment.

Even when controlling for conventionality, the relationship between religiosity and marital adjustment held. The correlation is not due to more religious individuals giving the socially desirable response about the quality of their marriage. In the beginning of his discussion of the conventionality issue Hansen (1981) suggested that if, on one hand, marital adjustment measures were severely contaminated with conventionality responses, the measures and research should be discarded. However, he continues, "If, on the other hand, this charge is not true, the cloud of doubt which has hung over marital adjustment should be lifted so that researchers can move forward and build upon the base of knowledge which is presently possessed" (Hansen, 1981:855). At least as far as religiosity is concerned, the cloud should be lifted.

In sum, consistent with other comparative studies (Glenn and Weaver, 1979) and other notable direct studies (Babchuk, 1967; Hunt and King, 1978; Kunz and Albrecht, 1977; Wilkinson and Tanner, 1980), religiosity appeared to have a direct impact on marital adjustment. Socioeconomic rewards and family development were, at least in this study, less adequate explanations of marital adjustment. This suggests that marital adjustment is a process of adaptation and that religion facilitates that adaptation. It may be a source of strength and vitality for relationships.

Religiosity deals with the areas of values and norms. It has been awhile since family scholars have put those issues into the forefront of their investigations. They may be more important for marital adjustment than socioeconomic resources and developmental characteristics. If such is the case, a fundamental reorientation of the explanations of marital adjustment is called for.

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Table 1. Zero-Order Product Moment Correlation Coefficients Among Variables. Means and Standard Deviations Provided. (N=208)

	Religiosity	SES	Income	Number of Children	Length of Marriage	Husband's Conventionality	Wife's Conventionality	$\bar{x}$	S.D.
Couple DAS	.34	-.06	.00	-.15	-.06	.57	.57	116.98	17.50
Religiosity		.03	-.12	-.03	-.02	.09	.18	128.08	12.00
SES			-.32	-.03	.07	.10	.00	33.08	14.81
Income				.15	-.03	-.17	-.06	2.83	1.15
Number of Children					.15	-.15	-.18	1.75	2.36
Length of Marriage						.16	.14	16.64	12.60
Husband's Marital Conventionality							.50	19.79	4.06
Wife's Marital Conventionality								19.16	3.86

Table 2. Results of the Multiple Regressions on Couple DAS Husband's DAS, And Wife's DAS. (N=208)

	R-Square	b	Beta	F
Couple DAS	.14			6.65**
Religiosity		.50	.34	26.65**
SES		-.04	-.03	.30
Income		.79	.05	.54
Number of Children		-1.09	-.15	4.86**
Length of Marriage		-.03	-.02	.11
Husband's DAS	.09			4.20**
Religiosity		.36	.26	15.12**
SES		-.05	-.04	.41
Income		-.72	-.04	.48
Number of Children		-.77	-.11	2.59
Length of Marriage		.11	.08	1.51
Wife's DAS	.15			6.86**
Religiosity		.63	.32	24.34**
SES		-.38	-.02	.12
Income		2.31	.11	2.63*
Number of Children		-1.40	.14	4.59**
Length of Marriage		-.17	-.09	2.00

*p < .05, df=5 and 202

**p < .01, df=5 and 202

Table 3. Results of the Multiple Regressions on Couple DAS, Husband's DAS, and Wife's DAS Controlling for Marital Conventionality of Husband and Wife. (N=208)

	R-Square	b	Beta	F
Couple DAS	.54			32.91**
Religiosity		.36	.24	24.53**
SES		-.06	-.05	1.13
Income		1.57	.10	3.84**
Number of Children		-.09	-.01	0.06
Length of Marriage		-.21	-.16	9.65**
Husband's DAS	.49			27.42**
Religiosity		.25	.18	12.38**
SES		-.08	-.07	1.70
Income		.19	.01	0.05
Number of Children		.10	.01	0.08
Length of Marriage		-.06	-.04	0.77
Wife's DAS	.41			19.66**
Religiosity		.46	.24	18.28**
SES		-.05	-.03	.31
Income		2.95	.14	6.04**
Number of Children		-.29	-.03	0.27
Length of Marriage		-.37	-.20	12.73**

*p < .05, df.= 7 and 200

**p < .01, df.= 7 and 200

Table 4. Decrease in R-Square Associated with Dropping Each of the Variable Groups Out of the Multiple Regression (N=208)

	Couple DAS	Husband DAS	Wife DAS
R-Square	.54	.49	.41
Religiosity	.06**	.04**	.06**
Socioeconomic Rewards	.02*	.01	.03**
Family Deveopment	.03**	.00	.04**

*p < .05

**p < .01